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Authority

By

NAPA Date

3/2/98

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Origin

ACTION: Amembassy LAGOS IMMEDIATE

Info:

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FOR AMBASSADOR MATHEWS FROM UNDER SECRETARY

SUBJECT: ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Nigeria

1. Following is text of letter from President to Gowon for immediate delivery:

"Dear General Gowon:

" As I wrote you in our earlier exchange of letters, the United States' long friendship with Nigeria has led quite naturally to our deep concern over the suffering in the civil war. We feel Nigeria's agony all the more as the fighting enters its third year.

"Since Ambassador Ferguson's appointment as Special Relief Coordinator on February 22, we have been following closely the progress of his efforts to expand the flow of relief to suffering civilians. We were greatly encouraged when your government took the important step forward of agreeing in principle to supplement the relief airlift with the opening of a surface corridor utilizing the Cross River.

" It is precisely because of this earlier hopeful progress that we have viewed with such gravity the relief impasse following upon recent decisions of the Federal Military Government. I can readily

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U - The Under Secretary

Clearances:

S/S - Mr. Brandt
White House - Mr. Morris
U - Mr. Ruser

U/CF - Amb. Ferguson
AF - Amb. Moore

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FORM 8-65 DS-322

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E.O. 12958, as amended 1/28/69

April 21, 2005

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appreciate your own concerns lest international relief efforts be exploited as partisan intervention in the civil war. The relief agencies obviously must observe the requirements of Nigerian security just as they acknowledge conditions imposed in the name of Biafran security. It is of evident importance that the agencies negotiate in earnest with your Government on this issue to reach an equitable and constructive agreement.

" Legitimate concerns allow -- and the enormity of the human tragedy demands -- humane statesmanship by all parties. Whatever the passions of the moment or rightness of the cause, history has judged harshly any government's heedless acceptance of suffering.

"Obviously the secessionist authorities have an obligation to forego political maneuvering to succor the starving under their control, and I hope indeed that President Houphouet-Boigny to whom I am writing about this same problem can impress this upon them. At the same time, the attitudes and actions of you and your Government with respect to saving the lives of those you regard, not as enemies, but as countrymen cannot fail to have a profound impact on the international community and on your future relationships in that

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community. Humanitarian treatment of non-combatants in civil strife -- wherever they find themselves in a divided land -- is surely the way, as you yourself have pointed out, to the reconciliation you seek for your country.

"I urge you, then, to agree with the Red Cross and religious voluntary agencies to an immediate resumption of the relief airlift and implementation of the Cross River relief corridor.

"The traditional friendship between our two peoples is indeed being tested by these complicated questions of relief and civil war. There are those who say that the United States does not understand Nigeria's agony. I believe we do understand, and that our interests, as your own, are best served by the peaceful development of Nigeria's great potential. But we can meet this test and serve our mutual goals only working together toward our common interest in saving innocent lives. I earnestly hope that this cooperation will surmount the forces of fear and suspicion until, as we all pray, your country is once again at peace.

Sincerely,

ROGERS

Richard Nixon

END

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